

REMARKS

An Office Action was mailed on December 16, 2003, and declared Final. Claims 1-25 are pending.

Claims 1-7, 9, 12-21 and 23-25 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Wasilewski (U.S. Patent 6,374,275) in view of Bowman et al. (U.S. Patent 6,006,225), while claims 8, 11 and 22 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Wasilewski '275 in view of Bowman et al. '225 and further in view of Wilson et al. (U.S. Patent 5,963,938). Finally, claim 10 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Wasilewski '275 in view of Bowman et al. '225 and further in view of Carey et al. (U.S. Patent 5,905,982).

Responsive thereto, Applicant has amended the claims to clearly distinguish the present invention over the prior art. Specifically, the claims now clearly require the co-dependent auditing of database entries and operators with each successive selection of a displayed entry and/or displayed operator to produce wanted, i.e., to avoid NULL results. Such claim amendments are clearly and exhaustively represented in the various examples in the specification and Applicant's letter to the Examiner dated September 17, 2003. Thus, using claim 1 as an example, the method of the present invention now requires the following steps:

- a. displaying a set of entries from a database of entries, displaying a set of operators, and displaying a result obtained from the selection of at least one entry from said database;
- b. selecting an entry of said displayed set of entries;
- c. updating said displayed result based on said selected entry;
- d. updating said set of displayed operators based on said selected entry and displaying only those operators from the set of operators that would guarantee that the displayed set of entries in the following step f. would contain at least one entry fulfilling the condition that all entries and operators selected so far combined with an operator from said displayed set of operators and an entry in the following step f. would produce a wanted result, the database search otherwise being over;
- e. selecting an operator from the displayed set of operators; and

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- f updating said displayed set of entries in response to the selected operator and displaying only those entries from the database of entries that would produce a wanted result based on the selected entry, the selected operator and a selection from the updated set of displayed entries;
- g. wherein said database search is completed when the displayed result is the desired result, or steps b through d and/or e through f are repeated until the displayed result is the desired result.

The Examiner is respectfully directed to any of the examples in the original specification for support for the amended claims. Based on such amendments, Applicant respectfully submits that all of the cited art, and in particular the Wasilewski '275, Bowman et al. '225 and Wilson et al. 938, individually and in combination, clearly fails to teach or render obvious the claimed invention.

First, Wasilewski '275 clearly fails to teach or reasonably suggest the auditing of entries and operators after each selection of an entry/operator and the production of wanted results, or the avoidance of NULL-value results, as required, and the display of a potential and/or desired result with each selection of an entry and operation, in accordance with the claims of the present invention. In this regard, the Examiner's primary reliance on FIG. 9 of Wasilewski, showing that one sub-menu only relates to one selection from the previous menu, and the search selection process of FIGS. 8-10, is clearly misplaced as it relates to the present invention as currently claimed.

For example, in FIGS. 8-10 of Wasilewski, once the user selects a first search term, such as "1997" in FIG. 8, an automatic auditing of both the operator field, such as "AND ... OR ... NOT ...", and a displayed result (nonexistent) does not occur, which automatic auditing would prevent a NULL value based on the first selection, such as "1997" and any displayed operator relative to all possible results. Continuing with the example of Wasilewski, if the user selects "COMPUTING" (702) followed by "AND" (802), it is highly doubtful that "ANIMALS" would be a viable option in the (806) window and would probably return an unwanted (i.e., NULL) value, although Wasilewski clearly doesn't discuss the auditing of the (806) window with the selection of the (802) window and the auditing of the (802) window with the selection of the

(806) window. This is clearly based on the difference in functionalities between the claimed invention and the teaching of Wasilewski.

A critical difference between the claimed invention and Wasilewski is that the selection windows in Wasilewski are static, i.e., the content in each window does not change with each selection. In other words, there is no automatic auditing of the selection contents of all available selection windows with the successive selection of any window content. Contrast this to the auditing of the displayed entries and the displayed operators of the present invention, which are continuously updated with each entry and/or operator selection. Such dynamically displayed entries and operators provide the means to generate a non-NULL value with every successive selection. While Bowman et al. reaches the avoidance of NULL values, it arrives at such avoidance using a completely different method than that of the claimed method.

FIG. 2 of Bowman et al. provides clear evidence of the differences from the claimed invention. In the claimed invention, auditing of database entries and operators occurs with each selection of an entry and operator, and results are displayed and automatically updated with each such selection. Thus, a user is able to produce wanted values, i.e. avoid NULL values, by only being given the opportunity to select displayed database entries and displayed operators that will produce some type of displayed result in real-time, as required by the amended claims. Bowman et al.'s NULL-value avoidance methodology is completely different. The selections quoted by the Examiner from Bowman et al. have nothing whatsoever to do with the automatic auditing of such displayed entries and operators with each selection of an entry and/or operator and the real-time display of non-NULL values with each selected entry and/or operator. **The beauty of the method of the present invention is that only a wanted, i.e. non-NULL, value result is displayed at all times and with each database and/or operator selection because each entry and/or operator selection triggers an automatic auditing of all displayed entry and/or operator selections so that a user could not possibly choose an entry and/or operator that results in a NULL value.** Bowman et al. clearly fails to contemplate such a methodology, but instead teaches the use of historical search queries to *favor* a non-NULL result. Bowman et al. fails to display all viable results in real time with the very first selection of a database entry, and fails to audit such results, entries and operators with each successive selection.

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Thus, one skilled in the art would not consider it obvious to arrive at the claimed invention by combining the teachings of Wasilewski and Bowman et al. because both references clearly fail to teach or contemplate the claimed methodology of real-time auditing of database entries and operators to ensure the real-time display of non-NULL values, and because the methodology of Bowman et al., if combined with Wasilewski, would not result in the claimed invention. While Wasilewski fails to ensure non-NULL values as recognized by the Examiner, Bowman et al. fails to provide any teaching or motivation whatsoever to ensure non-NULL values in accordance with the methodology set forth in the claims. As with Wasilewski, Bowman et al. also fails to provide dynamically altered sets of displayed entries, operators and results that change with each user selection. Thus, one skilled in the art would not be motivated to arrive at the claimed invention by combining the teachings of Wasilewski and Bowman et al.

The Examiner's reliance on Wilson et al. is also misplaced since Wilson et al. also does not teach or reasonably suggest the co-dependent auditing of menu items and operators with each successive selection of a displayed menu or a displayed operator (see, for example, "initiate function" (72) of FIG. 2). Column 10, lines 8-15 of Wilson et al., for example, merely discusses the limiting of possible operators based on the type of search term, but fails to discuss the continual, co-dependent auditing of menu items and operators to preclude a NULL result as set forth in the claims of the present invention. Thus, one skilled in the art would not be taught or motivated by Wilson et al. to provide for the continual, co-dependent auditing of menu items and operators in either Bowman et al. and Wasilewski to arrive at the claimed invention.

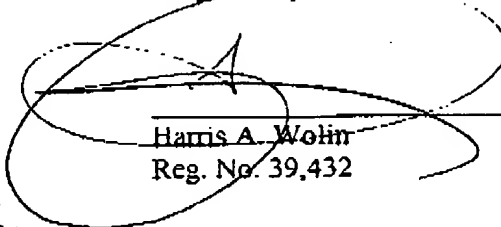
For the foregoing reasons, reconsideration and withdrawal of all rejections under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) is respectfully requested.

An earnest effort has been made to be fully responsive to the Examiner's objections. In view of the above amendments and remarks, it is believed that claims 1-26, consisting of independent claims 1, 18, 22 and 26 (claim 26 being similar in content to claim 1 but worded slightly differently) and the claims dependent therefrom, are in condition for allowance. Passage of this case to allowance is earnestly solicited. However, if for any reason the Examiner should

consider this application not to be in condition for allowance, the Examiner is respectfully requested to telephone the undersigned attorney at the number listed below prior to issuing a further Action.

Any fee due with this paper, including a \$43 fee for one extra independent claim, may be charged on Deposit Account 50-1290.

Respectfully submitted,



Harris A. Wolin
Reg. No. 39,432

CUSTOMER NUMBER 026304
PHONE: (212) 940-8708
FAX: (212) 894-5708 (direct)
DOCKET NO.: 3134/WEICK (083615-87523)

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